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ABSTRACT

During the past 12 years there was a sudden and unexpected consensus held by U.S. Congressmen and Presidents that students in U.S. public schools were learning less than they should. Moreover, the conservatives and liberals agreed that the proper policy response to this public problem was to raise education standards. Recent years brought five major federal policy initiatives to raise education standards: (1) America 2000, (2) Goals 2000, (3) the 1994 Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), (4) Voluntary National Tests (VNT's), and the (5) No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 (NCLB). For all the effort, the policies have failed. America 2000 and VNT's did not pass Congress, and Goals 2000, the 1994 ESEA, and NCLB have had negligible effects on standards. This paper hypothesizes that national politicians do not object to standards per se, but a deep-rooted political division has confounded efforts to create effective national standards policy. The paper states that: (1) the traditions of local control of schooling limited the politically feasible extents of raising educational standards through federal policy; and (2) liberals believe that academic underachievement is largely a function of school funding. It draws on a larger study that utilized primary source documents, including transcripts of congressional hearings on education bills and floor debates, the presidential platforms of the major parties, and interviews with policymakers. It supplements these with secondary sources, such as newspapers, the Congressional Quarterly, and the National Journal. (Contains 74 notes.) (Author/BT)

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Higher Standards: We'd Love to But...

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I. Introduction

Federal education politics have been peculiar during the past twelve years. There was a sudden and unexpected consensus- congressmen and presidents held that students in America's public schools were learning less than they should. Moreover, the left and the right agreed that the proper policy response to this public problem was to raise education standards. Accordingly, recent years brought five major federal policy initiatives to raise education standards: America 2000, Goals 2000, the 1994 Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), Voluntary National Tests (VNT's), and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 (NCLB). Yet, for all the effort the policies have failed. America 2000 and VNT's did not pass Congress; and Goals 2000, the 1994 Reauthorization of the ESEA, and NCLB have had negligible effects on standards.

Research Question:
Why have the efforts to make federal policy to raise education standards failed?

Hypothesis:
National politicians do not object to standards per se. In fact, they avidly support standards. However, a deep-rooted political division has confounded the efforts to create effective national standards policy. The sources of the present political divide in federal education politics are twofold. First, the tradition of local control of schooling limited the politically feasible extents of raising educational standards through federal policy. In short, conservatives have denied the federal government direct means for raising standards, forcing policymakers to use indirect and ineffective approaches. Second, liberals believe that academic under-achievement is largely a function of school funding. They have, therefore, refused to accept higher standards without federal action to equalize school funding and resources. Doing this though, would not only be expensive, but it would also be a dramatic invasion of local control, which, as noted above, conservatives stand firmly against.

Source Materials:
This paper draws on a larger study that utilized primary source documents, including transcripts of congressional hearings on education bills and floor debates, the presidential platforms of the major parties, and interviews with policymakers.[1] These were supplemented with secondary sources (newspapers, *Congressional Quarterly*, *National Journal*, texts, etc.)

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[1] Kevin R. Kosar, *The No Child Left Behind Act and the Politics of Education Standards* (manuscript presently being shopped to presses).

II. The Public Good of Education and Tradition of Local Control

In America, leading lights in government and society have long proclaimed the importance of education to good citizenship. Their arguments were manifold and often contradictory, but they agreed good citizenship was intimately related to education.

A number of the Founders were particularly vocal on the subject. Benjamin Rush, like Machiavelli and Montesquieu, argued that a republican government needed republicans. Since republicans are not autochthonic, they must be fashioned, and government-run public schools were just the institution to do this. Schools would teach the young to hold liberal ideas, republican morals, and a strong love of their country.[2]

Other early American thinkers were more concerned with threats to liberty that might come from government. After revolting from an overbearing king, Americans constructed a new federal system of government, shattering power to weaken it. This, though, was not enough. In order to keep government from usurping power that belonged to the citizenry, Thomas Jefferson held that a citizen must at minimum be able to recognize his rights and government encroachments thereupon. Thus Jefferson wrote, "It is an axiom of my mind that our liberty can never be safe but in the hands of the people themselves, and that too, of the people with a certain degree of instruction."[3] Such knowledge and skills would come from schooling. Jefferson also thought education was valuable because it weeded superstition and unthinking subservience to ecclesiastical authorities out of citizens' minds.

Benjamin Franklin, James Monroe, Daniel Webster, and other renowned men wrote and spoke on the importance of education to a healthy republic.[4] In her study of the writings and public speeches of prominent local members of the Whig, Democratic, and Workingman parties of first third of the nineteenth-century, Walsh found these elites mostly agreed on both the need for an educated citizenry and public provision for education. Moreover, "leaders of the two major parties offered almost identical suggestions in the areas of pedagogy, the curriculum and school governance."[5]

Obviously, the Founders were not the last to opine on the importance of education to citizenship. A century later Horace Mann straddled the American agrarian past and the developing mass American state. Like many of the Founders, Mann argued that good government required a learned people.

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[2] Benjamin Rush, "Plan for the Establishment of Public Schools," 1786, in Frederick Rudolph, ed., *Essays on Education in the Early Republic* (The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1965).

[3] As quoted in Henry J. Perkinson, *Two Hundred Years of American Educational Thought*, (Lanham, MA, University Press of America, 1987), p. 44.

[4] See Perkinson, *Two Hundred Years of American Educational Thought*; and Rudolph, ed., *Essays on Education in the Early Republic*.

[5] Julie M. Walsh, *The Intellectual Origins of Mass Parties and Mass Schools in the Jacksonian Period, Creating a Conformed Citizenry* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), p. 30.

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"By a natural law, like that which regulates the equilibrium of fluids, elector and elected, appointer and appointee, tend to the same level. It is not more certain that a wise and enlightened constituency will refuse to invest a reckless and profligate man with office, or discard him if accidentally chosen, that it is that a foolish or immoral constituency will discard or eject a wise man."[6]

Mann also conceived of the public schools as a tool for socialization. They would mold Americans. Like Benjamin Rush, Mann saw a relationship between public order and the homogeneity of the citizenry. If there was to be *unum* from *pluribus*, then the many must be taught to be one, and only the public schools could do this. As with the progressives who were to follow him, Horace Mann further believed that many of the ills society suffered could be eradicated if public policy encapsulated the latest scientific knowledge. Schooling could lower unemployment, end illiteracy, correct poor hygiene, bad manners, and curb profligacy.

This notion of using the schools to achieve social goals did not pass with Mann. In the twentieth-century, public schools were repeatedly called upon by assorted educators, politicians and interest groups to change their pedagogy or curricula in order to meet society's needs, be it temperance, preparing students to work in heavy industry, wiping out vestiges of racial discrimination and sexism, or inculcating multicultural sensitivity.

Perhaps the greatest transformation in the *raison d'être* for public education has come with the development of the American economy and America's entrance onto the world political stage. What began in calls for sober, obedient, and trainable young men for heavy industry at the turn of the nineteenth-century became a matter of individual and national survival in the increasingly knowledge-based, technological, and global economy by the turn of the twenty-first century. The Smith-Hughes Act of 1917, which marked the entrance of the federal government into the curricula of the public schools, was, in part, justified as a measure to contend with illiteracy, which weakened America's war fighting abilities.[7] The National Defense Education Act of 1958 (NDEA) was very much a response to a perceived technological and military inferiority to the Soviet Union.[8] And it has become a near article of faith that the ability of the United States to continue to compete economically against other nations will depend on the education levels of American workers.[9]

Despite this general zeal for an educated citizenry, the federal government made very little policy that would better prepare all American children for the responsibilities of

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[6] Lawrence Cremin, ed., *The Republic and the School, Horace Mann on the Education of Free Men* (New York: Columbia University, Teachers College, 1957), p. 26.

[7] Lamar T. Beman, *The Towner Sterling Bill,* (New York: H.W. Wilson Co., 1922), pp. 30-34.

[8] Barbara Barksdale Clowse, *Brainpower for the Cold War, The Sputnik Crisis and National Defense Education Act of 1958* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1981).

[9] For example, in his 1999 State of the Union Address, President Clinton said that the education of the young "must provide the knowledge and nurture the creativity that will allow our nation to thrive in the new economy." William J. Clinton, *State of the Union Address*, January 19, 1999.

citizenship until the 1990s.[10] In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, federal educational policymaking was limited to the occasional, small, pork barrel support of schools for the deaf and young women and land grants.[11] The federal government did not make major school policy until 1917 (when it passed the Smith-Hughes vocational education act). Localities and states have been the founders and primary caretakers of the public schools.

Were Americans largely hostile to federal education policy or convinced that American schools were performing superbly, Congress's hesitancy to make policy might be cognizable. However, since Gallup began taking polls on education in the late 1930's, Americans have consistently called for federal action to better the public schools.[12] In recent years the public has overwhelmingly favored increased federal involvement in the form of national education standards and assessments.[13] Yet, the tradition of local control continues. Today, the federal government funds less than 10 percent of the costs of public schooling.

III. The Achievement Crisis

Between 1917 and 1980, the federal role in public education grew slowly. Major policies were few and usually came only when there appeared to be a national crisis. For example, the National Defense Education Act of 1958 (NDEA) became law only after Lyndon Johnson, the media, and others had portrayed the launch of Sputnik by the Soviets as threatening the annihilation of the U.S.[14]

Typically, federal policies have targeted exceptional students, that is, students from a nonmajority demographic. Thus, the federal government created policies to assist American Indian children, poor and immigrant children, academically advanced students, children learning English as a second language, children living in federally affected areas

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[10] Federal government here means the legislative and executive branches. It excludes the judiciary, though the courts have made much policy of import. This study is about raising standards through federal legislation, not litigation.

[11] Gordon Canfield Lee, *The Struggle for Federal Aid, First Phase, A History of the Attempts to Obtain Federal Aid for the Common Schools 1870-1890* (New York: Columbia University, Teachers College, 1949), p. 12; William A. Mitchell, *Federal Aid for Primary and Secondary Education* (Princeton University: dissertation, May 1948), p. 3; and Daniel J. Elazar, "Federal-State Cooperation in the Nineteenth-Century United States," *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 79, issue 2, June 1964, pp. 255, 264.

[12] The data on public opinion receive further consideration in chapter three. Gallup polling data 1938 to present provided to the author by Gallup.

[13] *The Metropolitan Life Survey of the American Teacher 1993* (Louis Harris and Associates, Inc.); and John Immerwahr and Jeanne Johnson, *Americans Views on Standards: An Assessment by Public Agenda* (New York: Public Agenda, 1996).

[14] "Control of space," thundered LBJ before reporters, "means control of the world. From space, the masters of infinity would have the power to control the earth's weather, to cause drought and flood, to change the tides and raise the levels of the sea, to divert the Gulf Stream and change temperature climates to frigid." Lyndon Johnson, as quoted in, Caro, *Lyndon Johnson: Master of the Senate*, p. 1028. On Johnson's use of Sputnik for political advantage, see pp. 1024-1060. On politics, national emergencies, and federal education policies, see Kosar, *National Education Standards and Federal Politics* (New York University: dissertation, 2003), chapters 4 and 5.

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(e.g., places where the government activities impose costs on local schools), and so forth. Typically, then, federal education policies have been advocated by liberals seeking to redistribute wealth to children attending schools with insufficient resources (e.g. books, science lab materials, curricular options, etc.).

General education aid or policies (which target the student body as a whole) have only began to appear in the last decade (e.g., standards initiatives/policies such as America 2000, Goals 2000, Voluntary National Tests (VNT's), and standards based reforms of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA). Intriguingly, unlike the distributive of years past, these policies have aimed at improving the quality of the curriculum delivered more instead of remedying perceived imbalances in material resources.

The causes for recent interest in using federal power to improve schooling for all children are complex. What is clear, though, is that the appearance of an educational crisis in the 1980s fueled much of movement for federal action and standards.

A number of factors helped create the education crisis of the 1980s. For one, there was the economy. Congressman John Brademas noted, "[s]ince 1970, the United States ha[d] suffered three major recessions, each more severe than the one before. More Americans were out of work during the recession of 1981-82 than at any time since the Great Depression." While the American economy flagged, the stock market sagged, and the prime interest rate soared to twenty percent. Overseas, the West German and Southeast Asian "tiger" economies appeared to be growing rapidly. America's preeminent place in the world economy seemed imperiled.[15]

Then there was the growing discontent with the state of the schools among the general public and the research community. The media helped fuel a public outcry. It was not until the 1970s that the major media outlets began to carry stories on test scores.[16] Prior to 1974, no television network news program reported test score trends. Even though scores had begun sliding a decade earlier, the *New York Times* began to report Scholastic Aptitude Test scores only in 1976.[17] The state of education, though, soon became newsworthy. Between October 1975 and September 1977, the major networks aired seven stories on test score trends. During the period of 1982 to 1987, major network news programs broadcast stories on falling test scores six times.[18] Angus and Mirel note that in

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[15] On America's "obsession with Japanese economic dominance", see Steve Kelman, "The Japanization of America," *The Public Interest*, (Winter 1990, Number 98), pp. 70-83; quote at p. 78. This time saw a number of books to this effect, e.g., Ezra F. Vogel, *Japan As Number One: Lessons for America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979) and Jon Woronoff, *World Trade War* (New York: Praeger, 1984).

[16] Dorn notes that though test scores had existed since the turn of the twentieth-century, they had previously been for "internal consumption," that is, for the bureaucracy, not the public. Sherman Dorn, "The Political Legacy of School Accountability Systems," *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, January 1998, vol. 6, no. 1. Retrieved from http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v6n1.html.

[17] See SAT trends in chapter two.

[18] Ibid.

"November 1977...*Time* magazine ran a cover story that declared, '[T]he health of U.S. education in the mid-1970s --particularly that of the high schools-- is in deepening trouble.' The article mentioned rising levels of violence, truancy, and falling SAT scores. In April of 1981 *Newsweek* ran a similar piece. It declared that 'public schools are flunking.'[19]"

The *Newsweek* article also presented a Gallup poll that revealed almost half of those polled rated the work done by the schools as poor or fair. It was a "verdict that would have been unthinkable just seven years ago, when two thirds in a similar poll rated schools excellent or good." The poll further revealed that nearly 70 percent of the public wanted schools to place more stress on academic basics.

Among researchers, meanwhile, there was a revolution in the making.[20] In the late 1960s, James Coleman's research began recalibrating the field of educational research.[21] His studies on schooling raised a number of provocative issues.[22] Critically, Coleman's work raised the question of what factors were related to educational achievement and raised doubts about any neat, causal relationship between school inputs and achievement.

Researchers also had began the task of looking at successful schools. The media often reported examples of schools in high poverty areas that produced high achieving students.[23] And the "effective schools" research by Ronald Edmonds added scholarly weight to the media anecdotes by identifying the characteristics of schools that educated their students to high levels.[24] As the 1980s progressed, more and more researchers began to focus on the academic curriculum of schools as a causal factor in under-achievement. The low standards of the public schools and their habit of tracking poor and minority children into especially low rigor coursework came under attack in numerous reports and books. Mortimer Adler of the University of Chicago wrote *The Paideia Program: An Educational Syllabus*, which criticized differential tracking in the

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[19] David L. Angus and Jeffrey E. Mirel, *The Failed Promise of the American High School 1890-1995* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1999), p. 165.

[20] Chester E. Finn, Jr., writes that a "body of research dating back to James Coleman's path-breaking studies has found that there is no direct relationship between the amount of resources a school receives and its level of academic performance. This realization has led reforms to emphasize results rather than inputs." Chester E. Finn, Jr., "Making School Reform Work," *Public Interest*, Summer 2002, No. 148, p. 86.

[21] James S. Coleman et. al., *Equality of Educational Opportunity* (Office of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1964; James S. Coleman, et. al., *Trends in School Desegregation 1968-1973* (Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute, 1975), James Coleman et. al., *High School Achievement*, (New York: Basic Books, 1982); and James Coleman et. al., "Public and Private Schools," *Sociology of Education*, vol. 58, No. 2, 1985); James S. Coleman and Thomas Hoffer, *Public, Catholic, and Private Schools: The Importance of Community* (New York: Basic Books, 1987).

[22] Diane Ravitch, "The Coleman Reports and Education," in Aage B. Sorenson and Seymour Spilerman, *Social Theory and Social Policy: Essays in Honor of James A. Coleman* (Praeger, 1993).

[23] Chester E. Finn, Jr., "Making School Reform Work," *Public Interest*, Summer 2002, no. 148, p. 86.

[24] Ronald R. Edmonds, "Effective Schools for the Urban Poor," Educational Leadership, vol. 37 (October 1979). On Edmonds research, see Joseph P. Viteritti, "Agenda Setting: When Politics and Pedagogy Meet," *Social Policy*, vol. 15 (Fall 1984).

schools and called for all students to receive a rigorous education. Theodore Sizer, Ernest Boyer, and other eminent scholars and researchers weighed in similarly.[25]

Additionally, in the 1980s, the federal Title I education program began to come under criticism. Not long after its inception in 1965, stories about the misuse of Title I funds began to be heard in education policy circles. More problematic, though, was the evidence emerging that Title I's compensatory education program had not closed the achievement gap between poor and nonwhite children and all others.[26]

A seminal moment was the publication of *A Nation At Risk* in 1983.[27] The report, written by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, gave official government sanction to the crisis. Written in terms as alarmist as its title, the report described an education system that was rudderless and sinking. The nation had twenty-three million illiterates and test scores had been falling steadily for almost two decades. It declared that the very livelihood of America was threatened by the poor state of the educational system, the foundations of which were being "eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity."[28]

Within a few weeks of its April release, hundreds of newspapers reported *A Nation At Risk*'s grim findings on American education. David Gergen, presidential assistant for communications, said, "The report just took off in the media."[29] By June over 100,000 copies of *A Nation At Risk* were distributed.[30] The media and policy community uproar over the crisis was so intense that President Ronald Reagan was forced to back away from his promise for abolishing the Department of Education and reducing the federal role in the schools.[31]

Over the past two decades, public concern about educational achievement has not ebbed. A steady stream of widely reported, disappointing test scores has likely helped keep public concern high. Moreover, unlike previous educational crises that fingered a particular demographic of students as in need of help (e.g., the poor, the nonwhite, etc.), the present educational crisis purportedly affects all students. Most students (not just

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[25] Theodore R. Sizer, *Horace's Compromise: The Dilemma of the American High School* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984); Ernest L. Boyer, *High School: A Report of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983); John I. Goodlad, *A Place Called School: Promise for the Future* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1983); Arthur G. Powell et. al., *The Shopping Mall High School: Winners and Losers in the Educational Marketplace* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985); Denis P. Doyle and David Kearns, *Winning the Brain Race: A Bold Plan to Make Our Schools Competitive* (Oakland, CA: ICS Press, 1988).

[26] Launor F. Carter, *A Study of Compensatory and Elementary Education: The Sustaining Effects Study* (Department of Education, Office of Program Evaluation, 1983).

[27] National Commission on Educational Excellence, *A Nation At Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, April 1983).

[28] Ibid., p. 5.

[29] Dick Kirschten, "The Politics of Education," *The National Journal*, July 9, 1983, p. 1448.

[30] Thomas Ferraro, "The Sorry State of U.S. Schools, National Education Commission's Indictment Triggers Strong Movement for School Reform," *UPI*, May 25, 1983.

[31] On the growing public desire for federal action in education, see Richard G. Niemi et. al., *Trends in Public Opinion: A Compendium of Survey Data* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989), p. 84; and William G. Mayer, *The Changing American Mind: How and Why American Public Opinion Changed Between 1960 and 1988* (The University of Michigan Press, 1992), p. 86.

those of an easily identifiable type) are learning less than they should, and this is widely thought to have negative repercussions for the students and the nation as a whole.[32] Thus, in Schattschneiderian parlance, the loop of the political fray has been widen and the number of stakeholders increased. The effect has been to place pressure on both parties to devise solutions to the problem.[33]

IV. Standards: We'd Love to...

By 1990, the public and elite clamor for federal action to improve schools was sufficiently intense to elicit a governmental response. Indeed, between 1990 and 2002, there were at least five major efforts at enacting policy to improve public schooling by using federal power to raise education standards. They include America 2000, Goals 2000, the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994, Voluntary National Tests, and the No Child Left Behind Act. A brief description of these proposals and their fates are below.

America 2000:
Announced in April of 1990, America 2000 was a complex collection of initiatives.[34] Its main policies included codifying six education national goals, developing "world class standards" in education, and creating voluntary American Achievement Tests aligned to the standards. The Bush administration hoped to avoid political resistance by enacting much of America 2000 through executive authority. Congressional Democrats thwarted many of the administrations efforts. Nevertheless, the administration did fund the creation of national education standards in a variety of subjects. However, the first set of standards to emerge were condemned by the Senate 99 to 1; then the English standards were defunded because they were found to be of little use to states and schools. National standards in multiple subjects were created, but no states were ever required to use them. The American Achievement Tests were blocked by Congress.

Goals 2000 Educate America Act of 1994:
Goals 2000 was unveiled in April 1993 and became law a year later. For the purposes of this paper, the main policies of Goals 2000 sought to establish grants from which states could receive funds to support efforts at "fundamental restructuring and improvement of elementary and secondary education" through the "establishment or adoption of

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[32] At the micro-level, ill educated students are thought to face bleak occupational prospects; at the macro level, the nation as a whole may fall behind others economically. See, for example, Eric A. Hanushek, "The Seeds of Growth," *Education Next*, Fall 2002.

[33] Elmer E. Schattschneider, *The Semi-Sovereign People: a Realist's View of Democracy* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1960.) Prior to the 1990s, almost inevitably one party or the other stood against expanding the federal role in education. That now has changed. See Kevin R. Kosar, *National Education Standards and Federal Politics* (dissertation, New York University, 2003).

[34] Diane Ravitch, ed., *Debating the Future of American Education: Do We Really Need National Standards and Assessments?* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1995), p. 5.

challenging content and student performance standards."[35] States would craft their own standards and assessments and could submit them to the National Education Standards and Improvement Council (NESIC), which would certify that they were world-class.[36] Goals 2000 provided small grants to nearly every state. Goals 2000 expired and was not reauthorized in 2000.

Improving America's Schools Act of 1994:
This act reauthorized and reworked the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. Among other things, this bill altered the conditions for Title I aid. To qualify for aid, a state would, as with Goals 2000, have to show that it was adopting challenging standards and aligned assessments that all children, including those served by Title I, would be expected to meet. States that had created standards under Goals 2000 could submit these standards to meet the conditions of aid of the new Title I. States would also have to test students to see if they were making "adequate yearly progress" in "at least mathematics and reading or language arts." Students were to be tested "at some time during" grades three through five, six through nine, and ten through twelve.

Voluntary National Tests:
President Clinton announced his proposal for voluntary national tests during his February 4, 1997 State of the Union Address. Rather than tangle with the Republican controlled Congress, the administration contracted out many of the tasks and attempted to use executive authority to complete the rest. The objective behind VNT's was to create an official high bar of what constituted adequate learning levels. States would have an incentive to adopt these tests and raise their curricular standards to earn bragging rights (e.g., they could say they have world-class standards and tests). Republicans and some liberal Democrats worked together to block the administration and force it to sign a law that delayed creation of the assessments. As President Clinton's term in office ended, Congress announced that it would not authorize the development of VNT's.

No Child Left Behind Act of 2002:
NCLB builds on IASA's reforms of Title I. NCLB reiterated IASA's requirement that each state must develop standards and assessments in math and reading and language arts. NCLB added that each state needed to do the same for science by the 2005-2006 school year.[37] NCLB also mandated by the school year 2005-2006 each state had to test annually all students in grades three through eight in English and math and to begin

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[35] Clinton, *Proposed Legislation- "Goals 2000: Educate America Act,"* Title III, sec. 306.
[36] Ravitch notes that originally the administration wanted to call the council NESAC, for National Education Standards and Assessment Council. The word "assessment" was dropped in favor of "improvement" to placate liberals who worried over the use of tests as a policy tool. Diane Ravitch, *National Standards in American Education, A Citizen's Guide* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press: 1995), p. 154.
[37] Yet, as before, the federal government was not given the power to verify if states' standards are high, if they test "higher order thinking skills" as NCLB requires, and if standards and assessments are aligned.

testing some grade levels of students in science.[38] Schools must show adequate yearly progress, that is, the percentage of children scoring proficiently on exams must increase. Children in any school that fails to improve for two years earn a right to free tutoring; children in a school that fails to meet growth targets ("adequate yearly progress") must be granted the right to transfer to a non-failing school in their district

Three of the five standards policies became law (Goals 2000, IASA, and NCLB). This might be taken to indicate that our political system worked: voters and elites clamored for higher standards, the federal government delivered. This, though, is not the case. All three piece of legislation did declare that raising standards were their objectives. However, there is little evidence that Goals 2000, IASA, or NCLB have raised standards; indeed, it has been argued that NCLB may well lower state standards.[39]

The reason why the enacted policies have done little to raise standards is fairly obvious: they were permissive. The policies exhorted higher standards but did not exert federal power to raise them.[40] The shortcomings of the policies are blatant and described below in brief.

Goals 2000

Goals 2000 did not fund either national standards or national tests. States were not required to submit their standards for examination by NESIC. The law was clear on this point: "Not withstanding any other provision, standards or State assessments described in a State improvement plan submitted in accordance with section 306 shall not be required to be certified by the Council." To receive money, states only had to provide evidence that they were moving toward developing standards.

Improving America's Schools Act of 1994

It established no oversight for assessing the adequacy of the standards that states created. Like Goals 2000, the act established no quality control on state standards and assessments. The administration's oversight was lax, resulting in the majority of states not being in compliance with its rudimentary standards provisions as of 2002.[41]

No Child Left Behind Act of 2002:

NCLB gives the federal government no role at all in the crafting of education standards. While, for example, NCLB provides funds for grants to improve the teaching of

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[38] The 1994 reform of Title I, in contrast, required that states test only some of these grades each year. See NCLB Title 1 sec. 1111(b)(3).

[39] See, for example, Adam Emerson, "Schools May Lower Standards to Stay off Federal Watch List," *Lansing State Journal*, October 24, 2002; and Dan Goldhaber, *What Might Go Wrong with the Accountability Measures of the "No Child Left Behind Act"?* (Washington, D.C.: Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, February 13, 2002).

[40] For example, Goals 2000 declared "Congress finds that...all children can learn and achieve to high standards and must realize their potential if the United States is to prosper." P.L. 103-227, Title III, sec. 301 (1).

[41] E.g., a state's assessments were to be align with its standards. See P.L. 103-382, Sec. 1111(b)(1)(D).

American history, it leaves the actual content to the states.[42] States can set standards however high or low as they please. NCLB provided no federal oversight for examining the quality of state education standards and assessments.

This raises an obvious question: if support for using federal power to raise standards is high, then why have policies been ill-designed to this end? A number of hypotheses come to mind:

1) Public support was weak, therefore, politicians saw no real incentive to act;
2) Presidents did not support standards and so used their veto power to water down the policies;
3) Divided party control of the federal government enabled one of the parties to thwart standards reform.

None of these hypotheses stands up to investigation.

1) Public support has been quite strong.
Consider the following:
• The public's opinion on the spending priorities of government is quite clear. Public support for education spending by government rose from sixth on national priorities in 1973 to first by 1999.[43] A survey by the National Education Association in January 2000 substantiated this, finding that 38 percent of Americans rank education as the top priority, just above social security. Gallup polls in 1999 found similarly, with 87 percent of Americans saying that increased education spending was either a top or high priority.[44]

• While studies have shown that Americans have a tendency to support increased government spending but at the same time want their taxes cut, this view does not appear to hold with regard to education.[45] In seven out of nine polls between 1969 and 1986, the majority of Americans said they would be willing to vote for more taxes if the public schools said they needed more money.[46] Despite the recent economic downturn, voters remain adamant- they do not want education funding reduced.[47]

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[42] See Title II generally for the federal programs designed to bolster the education levels and competence of teachers. It must be noted that the NCLB does give the federal government influence over reading curricula in schools. Title I, Part B, which creates the Reading First program, requires that states use reading programs that are "scientifically based." Though *prima facie* innocuous, this phrase theoretically could be used by the federal government to, say, disapprove of a state application for funding if it is based on whole language approach as opposed to phonics.
[43] Staff, "Schools Rank first As Spending Priority," *The New York Times*, August 25, 1999, p. B8.
[44] NEA/Greenburg Quinlan Research, February 2000.
[45] e.g., Lloyd A. Free and Hadley Cantril, *The Political Beliefs of Americans* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1968).
[46] Stanley J. Elam, *How America Views Its Schools, The PDK/Gallup Polls, 1969-1994*, p. 21.
[47] Public Education Network, Education Week, *Accountability for All: What Voters Want from education Candidates* (Washington, D.C. and Bethesda: 2002).

• Polling data show citizens are particularly attracted to the idea of national education standards and assessments. In reviewing the data, Immerwahr and Johnson noted that support for implementing academic standards is: "at a consensus level among the general public;" "shared by all groups in the population," regardless of race, religion or age; is "not easily shaken," even when told that raising standards may deny some youngsters promotion or diplomas; based on a conviction that standards will help all students learn; and corresponds with deep-seated public concerns and values.[48] Furthermore, since 1970, no less than 69 percent of those polled favored requiring the public schools in their community to use national standardized tests to measure student achievement.[49]

2) Presidents have served as catalysts for change.

Presidents Bush, Clinton, and Bush have all been advocates for higher standards and have clashed with the more liberal and conservative elements of their parties over standards (a critical point that will be considered later.) All three presidents initiated bills that would wield federal power to raise standards. Remarkably, excepting the Dole candidacy of 1996, all Democratic and Republican nominees in the last three elections have advocated standards.[50] For example, the 1992 Republican presidential platform noted, "The critical public mission in education is to set tough, clear standards of achievement and ensure that those who educate our children are accountable for meeting them." The Democratic platform of 2000 spoke similarly, lauding the Clinton administration for its efforts to use federal power to help "states and communities set high academic standards for students."

3) Whoever controls the White House or Congress has mattered little.

Intriguingly, the past dozen years have seen a bevy of partisan control configurations:

• a Republican president with a Democratic Congress;
• a Democratic president with a Democratic Congress;
• a Democratic president with a Republican Congress fail;
• a Republican president with a nominally Republican controlled Congress.[51]

Nevertheless, national standards policies remain permissive. It is true, that divided government (especially with a Democratic president and Republican Congress) has made passing standards policy more difficult. Still, Goals 2000, a Democratic president's proposal, barely passed by a Democratic Congress and as permissive and unlikely to be effective.

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[48] John Immerwahr and Jean Johnson, "Americans Views on Standards," (Public Agenda, 1996), pp. 3-4.
[49] Jennifer Hochschild and Bridgett Scott, "The Polls Trends: Governance and Reform of Public Education in the United States," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 1998, vol. 62, no. 1, p. 79. See also The 29th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools, (Phi Kappa Delta, 1997).
[50] See the Democratic and Republican platforms of 1992, 1996, and 2000 at http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/site/docs/platforms.php
[51] For partisan breakdowns, see Appendix A.

V. But...

So why has Washington exhorted raising standards but failed to enact policy to this end. To answer this riddle, the author examined the debates surrounding the aforementioned proposals to raise standards. This meant reading committee hearings, secondary analysis by close watchers of Congress (e.g., reporters at *Education Week*, *National Journal*, *Congressional Quarterly*, etc.), and interviewing over 30 individuals in the education policy network. The aim was to see the logic underlying this seemingly contradictory behavior (exhort, but fail to produce).

What I found was that politicians do generally agree that standards should be raised. Interestingly, I failed to find one instance where anyone disagreed with higher standards as a policy for improving student achievement. That said, politicians were nevertheless split into three ideological camps on the question of standards. The standards policies output of the past twelve years have been the result of a collision of three politcal ideations: *antistatism*, *liberalism*, and *quality schools advocacy*.[52]

Antistatists are reflexively distrustful of increased federal involvement in public schooling.[53] They tend to stand against education bills (especially general ones) on principled grounds. As we saw in chapters four through six, some antistatists are strict constructionists, who argue that the Constitution does not empower the federal government to make education policy. They emphasize the long tradition and "genius" of local control over education. Other antistatists see the federal government as naturally inefficient, heavy-handed, blind to local differences, and having a tendency to accrete power. Some take a benign view of the inadequacies of the federal government, reasoning that inefficient federal education policy is caused by bureaucratism and the government's distance from localities. Others, however, attributed to the federal government an insatiable hunger for power and, in the case of federal education policy, a desire to indoctrinate children in ideology.[54]

Liberals, meanwhile, tend to trust the federal government more than state and local governments. They often note it was the federal government that coerced states to recognize and uphold civil liberties, endeavored to desegregate the schools, aid the poor, and deliver badly needed funds to impoverished school districts. In this view, the history of local and state schooling is replete with unequal treatment of the poor and non-white. The children who attend these schools are victims, victims of indifference at best and racism and classism at worst.

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[52] Chapters four and five traced the role antistatism played in earlier education debates. Chapter five and six introduced liberalism, chapter 6, the quality schools movement.

[53] Their reflexivity may be rooted in either principle or in their conservative disposition. William R. Harbour, *The Foundations of Conservative Thought: An Anglo-American Tradition in Perspective* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982).

[54] As Chapters four and five indicated, the fear that the federal government will use schools to indoctrinate children in noxious ideas goes back to at least the 1880s. The Clinton administration had to rebut the charge that Goals 2000 was a pernicious effort to teach children secular values. Author interview: William Galston, Deputy Assistant to the President for Domestic Policy in the Clinton Administration, May 29, 2002.

The *quality schools advocates*, roughly speaking, come in two types: those who think educational achievement can be improved through the interjection of market forces (choice advocates) and those who think it can be improved through governmental action to raise standards (standards advocates).[55] Standards advocates concede that an inadequate social environment and resource strapped schools can have adverse effects on student educational achievement. However, they differ from the liberals in their assessment of the primary cause of educational under-achievement and its remediability. Standards advocates locate the source of under-achievement in schools curricula. They take an optimistic view of student achievement: all children can learn at high levels if schools teach them at high levels. Since schools have shown themselves frequently unable or unwilling to set high standards, government action must compel or induce them to do so.

These three different ideations in large part account for the peculiar standards policy outputs. In general, antistatists fought policies that proposed giving the federal government a role in defining the content of education standards. Liberals fought standards proposals that failed to include policies that would remedy the per pupil funding gap between poor and nonwhite districts and all other districts. Antistatists battled against liberal proposals that tampered with state and local per pupil funding mechanisms. Yet, antistatists and liberals made common cause in thwarting voluntary national examinations. The former found them a gross federal usurpation of states' rights; the latter claimed they were unfair and punitive toward poor children (who would be unlikely to pass them because of their schools resource deprivations.) This left quality schools advocates struggling to win adherents but unable to stop either side from extracting concessions that compromised away the efficacy of standards reforms proposals.

The case of Goals 2000 is illustrative of the ideological challenges standards proposals faced. When William J. Clinton entered the White House, standards as a policy idea had gained near hegemonic status. Indicative of this was the 1992 presidential election. All three of the front-runners in the election --President George H.W. Bush, William J. Clinton, and H. Ross Perot-- had endorsed education standards.[56] Clinton had been particularly clear on this point, writing:

"By the year 2000, we should have national standards for what our children should know at the fourth, eighth, and twelfth-grades in math and science, language, geography, history, and other subjects, and we should have a meaningful set of national exams to measure whether they know what they're supposed to know."[57]

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[55] For a similar typology, see Chester E. Finn, Jr., "Education and the Election," *Commentary*, October 2000, pp. 44-48.
[56] Julie A. Miller, "Election 1992: Candidates Education and Related Policies at a Glance," *Education Week*, October 21, 1992, p. 22.
[57] Bill Clinton, "The Clinton Plan for Excellence in Education," *Phi Delta Kappan*, vol. 74, October 1992, p. 134.

As governor, Clinton had pushed for standards-based education reform in Arkansas. He had been one of the one of the big players at the now famed 1989 Charlottesville conference where governors and President G.H.W. Bush hashed out education goals for the nation. He was well positioned to enact major federal change. An adroit politician, he also had a Congress stacked in his favor: 57 to 43 in the Senate and 258 to 176 in the House.[58]

The administration justified using federal to raise standards largely as a means for improving economic productivity. Education Secretary Richard Riley, a governor who had helped enact standards reform in South Carolina, testified before Congress only a month after the inauguration of the new president. "Building a world class American work force starts with building a world class educational system."[59] Students, the Secretary explained, were not learning at high levels because schools did not have rigorous curricula based on "challenging content standards."

Before its official unveiling, Goals 2000 was in trouble. The first attacks, remarkably, came from the left. During the February Senate hearing, both Christopher Dodd (D-CT) and Senator Harken pointed to the financial inequities built into the school funding system. They argued that policy should be made to reform states' reliance on property taxes, which create gross disparities in per-pupil funding between localities. Howard Metzenbaum (D-OH) wondered whether it was fair to expect children in resource-poor schools and broken families to be held to high standards.[60] Opportunity-to-learn standards were quickly becoming a major bone of contention.[61]

In early March, the administration met with House education committee members to describe their plan for Goals 2000. Again, liberals gave the administration grief. Ford, also the Education and Labor's subcommittee chair, had told the administration through the media, "the legislation will not come out of my committee unless service-delivery standards are equal to or slightly ahead of any testing or standards."[62]

On the question of opportunity-to-learn standards, the administration attempted to steer a middle course between the demands of liberal Democrats and conservatives, educational committees, and state governors. As Riley later described it: "The Clinton administration inherited a major political dilemma pitting civil rights and education groups, on the one hand, against conservative members of the House and Senate, business groups, and governors and legislators on the other."[63]

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[58] There was one independent in the House.

[59] U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Labor and Human Resource *Examining the Need to Improve National Education Standards and Job Training Opportunities*, 103rd Cong., 1st sess., February 24, 1993, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993), p. 9.

[60] Ibid., pp. 22-39.

[61] Opportunity to learn standards [also called service-delivery standards] include all those material resources that might be construed to have an effect on the probability of students learning high content standards.

[62] Julie A. Miller, "Administration Readies Reform Bill," *Education Week*, March 24, 1993.

[63] Richard W. Riley, "Reflections on Goals 2000," *Teachers College Record*, vol. 96, no. 3, Spring 1995, p. 385.

Come April, Goals 2000 began to face challenges from the antistatist right. During a House hearing, Marge Roukema (R-NJ) confessed, "Mr. Secretary, I don't think you are going to win me over on this...I am absolutely convinced...that the so-called voluntary national system of skills standards combined with opportunity-to-learn standards will inevitably, like night follows day, lead to a national curricula [sic], to which I am unalterably opposed." By summer, antistatist attacks had become feverish. Interest groups such as Concerned Women for America and Phyllis Schlalfay's Eagle Forum decried Goals 2000's as a sneaky attempt to federalize education. Rep. Richard Armey (R TX) and the Family Research Council circulated a number of inflammatory letters to congressmen that claimed Goals 2000 was a gross power grab by the federal government that spelt the end for "three and a half centuries" of local control and educational liberty in America.[64] Governors added their voice to the chorus. The National Governor's Association wrote the administration, warning against "federal intrusion into an area that has historically been the responsibility of the states."[65]

A December 1993 poll revealed that 82 percent of Americans supported the idea of national standards.[66] Nevertheless, Goals 200 faced a harrowing time in Congress. The debates and negotiations were sometimes fierce. Once again, the differences between liberals and conservatives were not over the wisdom of raising standards to improve educational achievement. Almost without fail, congressmen, like the administration, insisted educational achievement was lacking, and the federal government was obliged to improve the educational achievement of all public school students so America could better compete in the international economic arena.[67] Still, the attacks continued from the left and the right. Even the usually collegial Senate saw acrimony. Senator Paul Wellstone (D-MN) worried that without more funds for poor schools, Goals 2000 would "set up goals that many young people cannot reach, and...fail them again."[68] Senator Carol Moseley-Braun (D-IL) warned federal standards and testing might be used for racist ends.

"As Stephen J. Gould highlights in his book, "The Mismeasure of Man," intelligence and achievement tests have been misused throughout history to "rank people in a single series of worthiness, to find that oppressed people and disadvantaged groups- races, classes, or sexes- are invariably inferior and deserve their status."[69]

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[64] As quoted in Ibid., p. 70.
[65] As quoted in Diane Ravitch, *National Standards in American Education: A Citizen's Guide*, (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1995), p. 151.
[66] New Standards Project, *Listening to the Public* (Pittsburgh, PA: National Center on Education and the Economy and the Learning Research and Development Center at the University of Pittsburgh, December 1993).
[67] E.g., see the speech of liberal Republican Senator James Jeffords (R-VT). *Congressional Record*, February 2, 1994, pp. S.608-609.
[68] *Congressional Record*, February 2, 1994, p. S629.
[69] Ibid., , p. S621.

Orrin Hatch of Utah (R) said Goals 2000 would result in "educational programming through national standards."[70] Senator Judd Gregg (R-NH) promised to fight Goals 2000 and "guard the Constitution."[71]

After much haggling and multiple near-successful efforts to kill Goals 2000, the bill barely became law on March 26, 1994. Clinton had passed his standards legislation, but the victory was largely pyrrhic. As indicated earlier, politics left and right made the Goals 2000 Educate America Act nearly ineffective policy. Two points are of particular importance.

First, liberal concerns over the effects of standards and assessments on poor and minority children made for almost Byzantine requirements for certification of assessments and standards by NESIC. Title II, section 213 stated NESIC "shall certify State assessments only if "a State can demonstrate that all students have been prepared in the content for which they are being assessed." Lugubriously, "all students" was defined to include pupils with disabilities, limited-English proficiency, and, oddly, those who had dropped out of school.[72] Title II further held that such tests could not be used for high stakes. Section 213 stipulated: "such assessments will not be used to make decisions regarding graduation, grade promotion, or retention of students for a period of four years from the date of enactment of the Act."[73] States wanting to use tests for these purposes would have to draw up a second set of examinations, a costly undertaking.[74]

Second, conservative fears of federal control over education eviscerated Goals 2000's standards oversight. The point of the legislation was to provide money to states so they could create and implement high standards and aligned assessments. To help states make certain their standards world class, states could submit them to NESIC for examination. Conservatives saw to it that states were not required to submit their standards to NESIC. They also inserted provisions reaffirming state and local power over curricula, such as Title III, section 319.

"Congress agrees and reaffirms that the responsibility for control of education is reserved to the States and local school systems and other instrumentalities of the States and that no action shall be taken under the provisions of this Act by the Federal Government which would, directly or indirectly, impose *standards* or requirements of any kind through the promulgation of rules, regulations, provision of financial assistance and otherwise, which would reduce, modify, or undercut State and local responsibility for control of education."

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[70] *Congressional Record*, February 8, 1994, quotes at pp. S1152, S1153, S1154.
[71] Ibid., p. S619.
[72] Goals 2000: Educate America Act, Section 3 Definitions.
[73] After four years, states were free to do so if they pleased.
[74] As it happened, NESIC was not seated and was abolished after the Republicans took majority control of Congress in November 1994. They justified the abolition of NESIC on the basis of local control.

Conclusion

Inevitably, the success or failure of legislation is a function of many variables. So too with the various standards-raising proposals of the past twelve years. The above should not be construed as a claim for monocausality.

Caveat made, there is a striking pattern. For all the public and political support for standards, politicians, and congressmen in particular, have failed to deliver them. Of the five major efforts, two failed to become law and three exert little federal power to raise standards. In each case, liberals and antistatist made demands that could not be reconciled. Liberals refused to support standards unless federal action was taken to remedy the per pupil funding differences between school districts, a phenomenon that is largely a function of our federal system. Antistatists, on the other hand, would not brook federal usurpation of longstanding local and state prerogatives over curricula and school funding.

No easy compromises were available because ultimately the standards debate was, in great part, a philosophical debate over the extent of national governmental power in America's federal system. As many times in the past, the left wanted an increased federal presence to remedy a social inequity; the right, meanwhile, argued in favor of preserving the existing apportionment of power between the national government and states. In the case of standards, the result was policy lacking power to get the job done. This is not what the public or their representatives wanted. Unfortunately, this is what we got and there's no reason to believe that we will get anything better in the foreseeable future.

Appendix A

Presidents and the Partisan Congressional Arenas they faced.

Year	President	Senate	House	Standards Proposal
1991-93	GHW Bush	44-56	167-267-1	America 2000
1993-95	Clinton	57-43	258-176-1	Goals 2000
1995-97	Clinton	47-53	204-230-1	IASA
1997-99	Clinton	45-55	206-228-1	VNT
1999-01	Clinton	45-55	211-223-1	VNT
2002-03	GW Bush	50-50	221-212-2	NCLB

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